

The Benefit of a Pastoral Vacancy

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It has happened recently, or it will happen again in your congregation. Your pastor has accepted a Divine Call to serve in another congregation. When the news is announced, a mourning process begins. Your shepherd has celebrated with you as he said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and poured



water over the head of that little one whom you love. He has preached Christ crucified and resurrected to you. He has pronounced forgiveness to you. He has served you a holy and precious meal of Christ's body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine for the strengthening of your faith and the forgiveness of your sins. He has been your shepherd and walked with you through the valley of the shadow of death. He has prayed for you, and you for him.

There is no doubt you will miss this shepherd who has cared for you.

Now things will change in your congregation. There will be a new face preaching from the pulpit and visiting the shut-in Saints. Depending on the availability of pastors in your area, it might not be the same face each week. You may well be asking, "How can any of this be beneficial to the life of a congregation and the care of the Saints whom God has redeemed?"

In the time when you and your congregation do not have a full-time shepherd, or even the same shepherd each week, keep in mind that the promises of God are still the same. **The gifts of God are still given and received.** The forgiveness that Jesus accomplished and has given to you is still pronounced to you. God and His promises do not change when a different pastor delivers them.



When a congregation does not have a full-time, permanent pastor shepherding the flock, it becomes necessary to consider some foundational questions and gives the congregation an opportunity for faithful reflection. This is where the benefit begins. During a pastoral vacancy, it is good for a congregation to consider a few questions

concerning pastoral ministry in the congregation and community.

Question one: Have we expected our pastor to carry responsibilities that God's people are also able to fulfill?

Pastors are, by nature, servants.

They want to help. Because of this, it is easy for a congregation to expect the new pastor to take on a particular task simply because the previous pastor did it.

The early church faced this same challenge in the book of Acts:

"And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word'" (Acts 6:2-4).



The pastoral office has very specific responsibilities that only the man in that office is given the authority to carry out. Dear Saints, remember that ministry in the church and outside the church is centered in these things, but these are not the only works of ministry. There are countless ways God's people can serve the church and the community.

Question two: How are we serving the people around us?

It is also beneficial to look at the church's life in the community. What is our congregation's outreach? What needs exist

among our neighbors that we can help meet?

Our churches change, our lives change, and our communities change as well. There might be great opportunities to "love your neighbor" that did not exist the last time



you evaluated your service in the community.

There is benefit in a pastoral vacancy because it encourages us to evaluate the mission and ministry of the church, both internally and externally.

Dear Saints, God be with you as you wait for your next shepherd to bring you God's precious gifts. I am praying for you. For all



of you who are sharing your pastor with another parish, be patient. I pray for you also. God knows whom He is preparing to shepherd His people and when that time will come. The question for all of us is

this: How can we faithfully serve so that more people may hear the hope and promises we have in Jesus Christ?

Questioning, so Christ's ministry can bring hope and healing.

President Sturzenbecher